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A
12,078 A STUDY
OF
GEORGE ELIOT'S ROMOLA

ROY SHERMAN STOWELL

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Mr. Byron A. Kilbourne,
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My dear Byron:

With many thanks for past
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Yours very sincerely,

Roy Sherman Stowell

April 1911

LITERARY STUDIES

A Study of
George Eliot's *Romola*

By

ROY SHERMAN STOWELL
(M. A. Cornell)

Author of "The Significance of The
Ring and the Book"

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DEDICATED

TO MY BELOVED PROFESSOR

HIRAM CORSON, M.A., LL.D.

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PREFACE.

THE following paper, a few slight alterations having since been made, was read before a seminary engaged in the study of nineteenth century English novelists, conducted at Cornell University by Professor Hiram Corson, LL.D.

Each member of the seminary was requested to present in some such form one of the novels suggested by Professor Corson, and each one was required to read all of the novels chosen by the other members of the seminary in order that a helpful discussion of the subject might follow the reading of each paper. It therefore follows that the writer of the present paper pre-supposes such a knowledge of the subject as might be obtained by a recent and careful reading of the novel.

It was intended that these essays should represent in each case the student's individual interpretation of the novel chosen, and it was desired that the paper should be written before the student's ideas were modified by a study of the

reviews and discussions to be found upon the novel which engaged his study. This explains the fact that so little literature of that nature was consulted in the preparation of this paper. The work is therefore more independent than could otherwise be expected.

R. S. S.

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A Study of George Eliot's "Romola."

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

ROMOLA is a novel which I have read many times, and each time approaching it with a new point of view, I have been rewarded with a new and a better insight into the writer's art. I remember very distinctly some of the impressions received from the first reading of the novel and a brief consideration of these may serve as a fitting introduction to the more recent study of the book which has been chosen for this evening's discussion.

The first reading occurred during those busy student days when the mind of the youth seems to be divided between the forensic burden of the "Orations against Catiline" and the heavy, regular tramp of the "Εντεῦθεν ἐξελαύνει." Be-

tween these two, is the inevitable preparatory "math," with its bridge of sighs, technically known as the "pons asinorum." This road, dusty with classroom chalk, is, as all students know (whether they trudge wearily afoot or ride gaily along on the poor little much abused "pony"), fringed with some Science and History and a great deal of English.

The writer who was innocent enough to believe that "passing up" was the great thing in life, found little time for reading fiction, but devoted such time as he could command upon novels which had a recognized historical value. The idea of literary value, as such, aside from the more apparent beauties of style, had never impressed him as worthy of consideration. The literature of *power* seemed of less consequence than the literature of *knowledge*. It may be from this cause that the student had never read any of George Eliot's works and was led to read *Romola* because, at the time, his interest was centered in the study of Savonarola and the condition of Florence under the patronage and tyranny of Lorenzo.

Be that as it may, the novel proved to have an

interest of its own that eclipsed its historical value, which alone would make it worthy of very thorough consideration. Its interest lay in the portraiture of character, in the evolution of the individual rather than in the presentation of circumstances and the change of material conditions. The purpose of the book seemed to be the portrayal of the gradual moral decline of Tito. I could not understand why the novel was not entitled "Tito" instead of "Romola." Tito was the character which stood out in the white light of prominence throughout the entire book; while Romola seemed to me almost a nonentity, a being so reticent that the reader scarcely becomes acquainted with her until the closing chapters, when, after Tito and Baldassarre have found each other in the embrace of death, and Savonarola has suffered for the last time, the two women, Tessa and Romola, are the sole surviving characters to command the reader's attention. Of these Romola, the more lofty nature of the two, proves to be the medium of communication by which George Eliot voices the teaching of the book. "It is only a poor sort of happiness that could ever come by

caring very much about our own narrow pleasures. We can only have the highest happiness, such as goes along with being a great man, by having wide thoughts, and much feeling for the rest of the world as well as ourselves; and this sort of happiness often brings so much pain with it that we can only tell it from pain by its being what we would choose before every thing else, because our souls see it is good."*

Although I appreciated the fact that the real purpose of the book was good, yet I regarded it thoroughly immoral. The evil of the novel seemed to be augmented by the fact that the character who proves to be the villain is the one to whom the reader is first introduced and for whom his sympathy and his admiration are at once aroused. A young and handsome Greek scholar, a stranger and destitute in Florence, and who would not at once sympathize with Tito? As we see him overcome his difficulties and win for himself the esteem and friendship of cultivated Florence, who can resist the feeling of admiration for his scholastic prowess and

*Romola, pp. 575, 576. The Cornell Series of 12 mos. No. 109.

his noble endeavor? We are even led to excuse his early mistakes, we accept as reasonable his arguments for remaining at Florence where the future gives promise of power and glory as the fitting rewards for his literary genius instead of wasting his little substance on an uncertain quest for the aged Baldassarre whom he has much reason to believe is already beyond the turmoil of earthly existence. That this man, whom we would at first make our hero, should prove not only selfish but false, incapable of responding to the pure and exalted love of a noble woman, and dependent upon the less ennobling relations which he sustained with the innocent and simple minded Tessa, I regarded as seriously detrimental to whatever good the book might seek to accomplish, because the reader is brought into sympathy with evil rather than virtue.

While for these reasons I could not exactly approve of George Eliot's presentation of the theme, yet I realized from the first that it was a strong book, although the source of its vitality was not correctly nor, in fact, definitely defined in my mind. Therefore it has been of interest

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to me upon subsequent readings to note the different impressions resulting from a changed point of view. We shall find that these very subjects or phases of the book which impressed me at first still make a large claim upon the attention and I shall endeavor to show, as well as my present understanding will permit, why the novel bears the title *Romola*, although *Tito* is the character which seems to be the storm center of the piece.

CHAPTER II.

THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE.

ROMOLA is a novel which lends itself readily to study as a historical subject, a psychological problem or a work of literary art. No consideration of the book could claim to be complete which ignored any one of these. It is my purpose to consider the book from these three standpoints in the order named, beginning with the less important and proceeding to the most essential elements in its composition as a great classic of literature.

Romola is a dramatization of the classical Renaissance in Italy. The Medici, Savonarola and Machiavelli are actual historical characters that lived and moved in Florence amidst the labyrinth of her political, religious, literary and social development. Aside from these characters which appear in history, the writer has presented the distinct types of the period—the Greek, or classic element, represented by Tito;

the religious fanatic, Fra Luca; the humanist, Bardo; the pedantic plebeian, Nello; the lower strata of society represented by the witless Tessa, the contadina; the aristocratic, non-religious element exemplified in such a soulless individual as Dolfo Spini; the conservative practical citizen, Bernardo del Nero, and the expression of the "New Life of the Renaissance" depicted in the character of Romola herself, for just as all of these characters center about and influence her, so the various factors typified gave form and character to the development of consciousness which manifested itself throughout Italy in the keener appreciation of the true worth of classic art and literature, the discovery of the importance of individuality and the attainment of self-conscious freedom to the human spirit which is known as the Renaissance or "new birth."

The Renaissance implies something more than the mere Revival of Learning, although that is the phase of the "new birth" which has most impressed itself upon European thought. The fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the subsequent scattering of Greek scholars throughout

Latin Christendom did, no doubt, exert a great influence upon western Europe, which, till that time, knew little of Greek thought. But that is not all.

Students of philosophy and theology see in the Renaissance the discovery of manuscripts, the love for antiquity, especially a passion for anything Greek, a progress in philology which afforded a more perfect interpretation of Platonic philosophy and gave rise to new systems of thought, to a quickening of religious as well as intellectual consciousness which culminated in the Lutheran schism and the emancipation of conscience.

The political historian notes the gradual extinction of feudalism, the emancipation of the Italian municipalities from the yoke of the despot, the growing spirit of nationality, the well defined limitations of ecclesiastical authority, the waning of superstition, the secularizing tendency of the Papal power seeking to establish itself as an Italian kingdom, and finally the gradual emergence of that sense of popular freedom which was to culminate in the Revolution.

To the scientist, the great names of the Renaissance are Vesalius, Copernicus and Galileo. It was the period when science was loosed from the restraints of theology. Theology was no longer able to control the philosophy and science of the time. Science finds a new task for itself, the discovery of the laws of the natural world and the investigation of man as a natural being. Already the scientific spirit begins to assert itself.

Was it not likewise the golden age of geographical discovery and mechanical invention? May not the jurists describe this period as the starting point of legal reforms based upon the acquisition of the true text of the Roman Code, a period characterized by the attempt to introduce a rational method into the theory of modern jurisprudence as well as by the first efforts to establish international law?

The content of the term *Renaissance** is so comprehensive that it seems adapted to every

*This discussion of the Renaissance follows very closely that of J. A. Symonds in his "Short History of the Renaissance in Italy" to which I am greatly indebted.

point of view. It is therefore not surprising that many of these phases of the Renaissance are not represented in the novel before us.

It is chiefly the classical phase of the Renaissance, together with some vague traces of the political and religious conditions with which the writer is concerned. The scientific, legal and geographic development is entirely ignored. Moreover, the conditions are simply those of Florence and while Florence may, in many respects, serve as a type of the mediæval Italian cities which were the first to feel the effects of the new impulse, yet no other city had such a patron of art and literature, such an absolute municipal despot as Lorenzo de Medici, no other city had a Savonarola to hold Rome in abeyance while he instituted municipal government on the one hand and held up before the people the deplorable condition of the ecclesiastical administration on the other. At best this is, therefore, but a partial presentation of local conditions during a very important but limited space of time. A cross section of a particular branch so worked up as to show vividly certain

features of the grain while some of the less important characteristics are entirely hidden.

The blind old scholar bent upon the labors of collection and annotation, disappointed in the son who forsook his father's home for the church, dependent upon his beautiful daughter for his very eyes, may very possibly represent the straightened condition of twenty literary devotees whose work lives on as a silent testimony of their patient endeavor, although their names have long since been forgotten.

We know that many a Greek came to Italy under less favorable conditions than Tito. Hundreds of them were forced to be counted slaves that they might turn their literary abilities into means of livelihood. The ever meddling and never tiring barber gives to the story a realistic touch which would almost remind one of the average modern tonsorial artist. The son who forsook his father's home for the church was common enough in the days when the church was not highly esteemed by the great mass of the most cultured society. Savonarola himself had in secret left Ferrara and journeyed to Bologna where he became a Do-

minican. "It was on April 23, 1475," says Villari, "he was sitting with his lute, and playing a sad melody; his mother, as if moved by a spirit of divination, turned suddenly round to him and exclaimed mournfully: 'My son, that is a sign we are soon to part.' He roused himself and continued, but with a trembling hand, to touch the strings of the lute without raising his eyes from the ground." "This," writes John Addington Symonds, "would make a picture: spring twilight in the quaint Italian room, with perhaps a branch of fig tree or of bay across the open window; the mother looking up with anxious face from her needlework; the youth with those terrible eyes and tense lips and dilated nostrils of the future prophet, not yet worn by years of care but strongly marked and unmistakable, bending over the melancholy chords of the lute, dressed almost for the last time in secular attire."*

On the very next day Savonarola left his parental home forever. The difference between

*Symonds. *A Short History of the Renaissance in Italy*, p. 87.

our modern civilization and that of mediæval Italy may be shown in this: American boys run away to the prairies of the west, English boys run away to sea, French boys run away from home to the army, but the mediæval Italian youth left his home for the church.

The reason given by Dino upon his deathbed for thus deserting his father's house corresponds to the memorable statement which Savonarola wrote to his father regarding his own action. "The motives by which I have been led to enter into a religious life are these: the great misery of the world; the iniquities of men; their rapes, adulteries, robberies, their pride, idolatry, and fearful blasphemies, so that things have come to such a pass that no one can be found acting righteously. I could not endure the enormous wickedness of the blinded people of Italy; and the more so because I saw everywhere virtue despised and vice honored."*

*Symonds, p. 88.

CHAPTER III.

SAVONAROLA.

ASIDE from the general picture which Romola affords us of the lettered and elegant age of the Renaissance in Florence, the chief claim of the novel to our *historical* interest rests upon its portrayal of Savonarola.

George Eliot deals with individuals rather than institutions. She treats the individual as a distinct personality struggling with problems affecting the moral life that are as universal as humanity, yet are unique and distinct in each specific case.

The very mode of her presentation of Savonarola seems to me to accord well with the actual influence which the great Dominican exerted over his time. He was a power that was felt rather than seen, a voice of one crying in the wilderness, "Repent! Turn from your evil ways, Oh shameless Florence, for the day of your judgment is at hand." There is an under-

tone of solemnity and majesty in his nature which is simply grand.

Although he seldom appeared in public and then upon no ordinary occasion, yet his presence in Florence was constantly felt by all classes of society. He lived in the sub-consciousness of the actual Florentines just as he lives in the sub-consciousness of the thoughtful reader. It is impossible to consider the novel without him, for although he actually appears but a very limited number of times, yet his presence is felt on nearly every page of the book, the citizens are constantly alluding to him, are trembling at his power or planning to overthrow his authority. The influence which this character exerts upon the reader of the novel is witnessed by the fact that something relating to the great Dominican has appeared upon nearly every page of the present paper though our special attention has not until now been directed to him.

As represented in the novel, he stands before us, as it were, in the background of the picture like a shade of sadness, his keen but almost repulsive features partially hidden from us by the

cowl of his order, those deep grey eyes which in early years had beheld the vice and gaiety of the brilliant court of Ferrara and loved it not, still speak forth the contempt of his inmost soul for the vanity of the world and the sins of the church, still flash forth the occasional gleam of prophetic luster; those firmly compressed lips are sealed to the service of idle speech and open only when his intense soul is full with that which must be uttered.

Such was he in reality, the only man in Florence who dared to stand before Lorenzo, the Magnificent, and lay bare before this elegant despot his sin besmirched soul, the only man in Italy from whom this dying Lorenzo would seek absolution, perhaps the only man in Christendom who would have dared to let this great patron of art and letters die unblessed.

The temptation which Savonarola had to strive against was the temptation which comes to every man who feels himself gifted from on high with the power of leading his fellow man in works of righteousness. The tendency to glory in the exercise of power, though it is used for a worthy purpose, is itself a sin of no small

consequence for one who has dedicated his entire being to the service of God. Such a temptation, aside from rendering the ideal of self abnegation impossible of attainment, engenders the temptation to a more terrible sin, that of prostituting this heaven born gift to secular and even worldly advantage.

Aside from this, Savonarola suffered the temptation of doubt. At the critical moment his faith in God seemed to falter. This constant struggle with evil, within and without, his doubts, his failures, his final triumph, his sad but glorious fate have been faithfully and vividly depicted by the novelist.

Although the features of George Eliot's Savonarola which pretend to be historically truthful are beyond reproach, yet I believe that this character was not intended by the writer to be a contribution to history, but rather as a necessary feature to the artistic vitality of the book. Like Browning's Pope in "The Ring and the Book," he is introduced not primarily as a historical character, but because no less a personage would be adequate to the demands of the

writer's art. Savonarola is the undertone of majesty and solemnity, always present in the sub-consciousness of the reader, which gives a depth and sternness to the entire work.

CHAPTER IV.

TITO.

IN a paper of this length, it is not permitted us to exhaust even the historical background of this book, for we must pass at once to the second part of our study in order that each may receive such a portion of the attention as its relative importance seems to merit.

Whatever there is of art in this novel is dependent upon that in it which is eternal. That which is eternal in *Romola* is the subtle portrayal of the character formation of the heroine and the moral decline of Tito. The degeneration of Tito is the first to be considered because it is this which causes the great sorrow to come over her which awakens *Romola* to a realization of her true self and her larger mission in life.

Two natures are exhibited in Tito, neither one at first is absolutely good or bad. Like the strings of a violin they are pitched to different tones, the one is the higher, the more artistic,

the more lofty nature, the other is the more natural, more passionate, more sympathetic nature. The latter being the seat of the stronger passions is more susceptible to evil.

His career exhibits the gradual ascendancy of the lower nature over the higher, the usurpation of his keen intellectual powers to his most selfish ends, the prostitution of all that is good in his nature to the service of its very lowest form, selfishness, cowardice and deceit.

"There was a man," said Romola in the closing lines of the book, "to whom I was very near, so that I could see a great deal of his life, who made almost every one fond of him, for he was young and clever and beautiful,—and his manners to all were gentle and kind. I believe when I first knew him he never thought of doing anything cruel or base. But because he tried to slip away from everything that was unpleasant, and cared for nothing else so much as his own safety, he came at last to commit some of the basest deeds—such as make men infamous. He denied his father and left him to misery; he betrayed every trust that was reposed in him, that he might keep himself safe

and get rich and prosperous. Yet calamity overtook him."*

In the above quotation we have a very clear presentation of Tito as he is first introduced to the reader. Young, handsome, refined, of pleasing manner and capable parts, he stands before us the finished production of an education and environment which has cultivated his higher nature and developed the artistic side of his being. His character, however, is an untried, an unknown force. We are not aware that he has ever undergone any great temptation, that he has ever discovered the force or limitations of his own character. In short, he does not learn to know himself any faster than the reader is permitted to witness the unfolding of his real nature.

When he finds himself a stranger in Florence with absolutely no means at hand save a few gems, rescued like himself from the sea, he has a problem of duty facing him, the solution of which is as yet impossible. His foster father, the aged Baldassarre, the owner of the gems

*Romola, p. 576.

which the young man has in his possession, is doubtless in slavery waiting to be ransomed by his own jewels.

I believe that at first the young Tito honestly intends to accomplish this if possible. Why should he not? Florence as yet has no attraction for him. There can be no gratification to a young and intelligent man in refusing to give what aid is within his power to rescue a fellow countryman, to say nothing of a foster parent to whom he is indebted for all the pleasures of life, from the bonds of undeserved slavery. To be sure, all of his relations with the old man had not been entirely happy. There had been of late years a lack of sympathy, almost an estrangement existing between them which caused Tito to breathe freely when he felt himself at first relieved from the rigors of parental vigilance, yet that could not pretend to be a sufficient motive for wilfully neglecting Baldassarre in his misery.

But while the spirit may have moved Tito to undertake the rescue of his father, two difficulties prevented immediate action; first, he had no ready means, barely enough to eke out his

own subsistence. Was he not forced to purchase his breakfast with a kiss? Was it not his first care to provide for himself a temporary livelihood until he could secure purchasers for his gems and thus provide the ready money necessary for such a long and expensive journey as the uncertain quest for Baldassarre would doubtless prove? Secondly, had he any assurance that such an undertaking might not be an absolute failure? He did not even know that Baldassarre was alive, let alone knowing where he could be found. Was it wise to think of undertaking a search through such an extended region as the Mediterranean world afforded upon no more certain information than a vague surmise? Certainly not, all that he could do at present was to wait.

From the first we have indication of Tito's tendency to evil in the distrust which the artist Piero bore him from their first acquaintance. Judging men keenly from their facial expression as his profession led him to do, the painter saw in Tito's finely wrought features those of a hero or a traitor, a face adapted equally to the requirements of the higher or the lower nature

of the man, whichever should predominate. "He has the face," said Piero, "that would make him the more perfect traitor if he had the heart of one, which is saying neither more or less than that he has a beautiful face informed with rich young blood, that will be nourished enough by food and keep its color without much help of virtue. He may have the heart of a hero along with it; I aver nothing to the contrary."*

I conceive Tito's first downward step to have occurred at the time when he had overcome the first and most serious hindrance to the fulfillment of his filial obligation. He had sold all his jewels, except the ring he did not choose to part with, and he was master of full five hundred gold florins. More than a man's ransom! "The moment when he first had this sum in his possession was the crisis of the first serious struggle his facile, good humored nature had known."†

But conditions had by this time changed. The young Tito was no longer the lonely stran-

*Romola, p. 41.

†Romola, p. 97.

ger that had somehow made his way to Florence, no longer the simple foreigner to whom the city tendered an indifferent greeting and who found within its walls nothing of personal interest or attraction. Tito had already found the cultured society of Florence appreciative of his literary talents. The question of obtaining a livelihood had quickly been settled, his future was secure, he had won himself into the good graces of the blind Bardo, had found in Romola a being worthy of his deepest devotion. "Tito had had the rapid success which would have made some men presuming, or would have warranted him in thinking that there would be no great presumption in entertaining an agreeable confidence that he might one day be the husband of Romola."* Moreover, it was finally agreed that Tito should be supported in a Greek chair. "Tito was thus sailing under the fairest breeze, and besides convincing fair judges that his talents squared with his good fortune, he wore that fortune so easily and unpretentiously that no one had yet been offended by it. He was not unlikely to get into the best Florentine

*Romola, p. 95.

society for where could a handsome young scholar not be welcome when he could touch the lute and troll a gay song? Here was a professor likely to render the Greek classics amiable to the sons of great houses."[†]

Thus the temptation to remain at Florence, to be near Romola, to assist her aged father, to make the most of the brilliant opportunities offered to him, is a new factor in the moral problem challenging his integrity. Is his gratitude, his filial devotion strong enough to overcome such temptation? I believe that at first he honestly intended to search out his father if he could procure the means; the means have now been procured. Is his failure to undertake the task an indication that his gratitude has waned? I believe not,—his intention is no weaker than it was at first. It is simply exercised now under changed conditions. It is put to the test and found wanting. The temptation is stronger than the will to do right. Whether or no Tito realizes the situation at the time it is difficult to say. This much is certain, he convinced himself, honestly or otherwise, that the time for ac-

[†]Romola, pp. 96 and 97.

tion had not yet arrived. The second and less important cause for delay, the uncertainty of the undertaking, now appears an all sufficient reason for temporarily giving up the project. If Tito had been questioned at the time he would have asserted that nothing but ignorance of his father's whereabouts deterred his immediate efforts to rescue him.

In short, for the first time he was obliged to pause and consider whether he would surrender and obey or whether he would give the refusal that would entail irrevocable consequences.

I can not but think that his decision at this time, however much he may have attempted to mask it under the guise of discretion, was, in fact, a real blow to his finer sensibilities. If his introspection was honest and thorough, and this, by the way, is the greatest fault I find with the novel, that Tito seems to have so little power of introspection. Yet possibly the novelist labored under the impression that introspection was never a quality of the Greek mind and that therefore a Greek humanist, especially such an atheist as Tito, was incapable of close introspection. Yet if Tito's introspection at this time

had been honest and thorough, he must have seen back of the flimsy excuse with which he attempted to satisfy his conscience, the real cause lying in the overmastering power of his lower, more selfish nature. If he failed to understand this, he did not know himself as well as the reader is permitted to know him. The simple fact was this. He sold himself to evil by wilfully neglecting to do his duty to the best of his ability, because it entailed a sacrifice of his own selfish pleasures, and from this point on his moral decline is rapid and sure.

That which leads me to believe that Tito did not regard his excuse as absolutely sound is the fact that he did not dare to confide his secret to Bardo or Bartolommeo Scala. It was part of his nature to conceal truth, he had both a talent and love for reticence. "What was the use of telling the entire truth?" On the other hand, what would have been the harm if so doing could not have entailed further obligation?

The second step in Tito's moral decline occurred when the second and sole remaining cause for his delay no longer existed. From the moment that he had definite information re-

garding his father at Antioch, he no longer had the shadow of an excuse for further delay. But Tito had an unconquerable aversion to anything unpleasant, and leaving Florence at such a time to search out the aged Baldassarre, who when found would very likely check the young man's brilliant career, could not be regarded as anything but an unpleasant duty. Was it indeed a duty? Or might it not be considered an act of charitable friendship involving such a sacrifice of personal interests as to render it entirely beyond the bounds of obligation.

Tito, shorn of every reasonable excuse, must either do the act demanded of filial gratitude or admit himself to be nothing but a selfish, ungrateful wretch or else trump up some reason for suspending action.

The idea of leaving Florence for this purpose no longer occupies his mind. I believe he had gone so far that he would sooner choose to remain at Florence, mindful of his own wretched condition, which by this time seemed to be a matter of less concern to him than the fear of discovering his true nature to those whose friendship and confidence he enjoyed. But to re-

main without the shadow of an excuse was not to be thought of except as a case of last resort. It was easier by far for this brilliant Greek scholar to take refuge from the pangs of conscience behind some excuse, however imperfect it might be. The production of the excuse had been rendered all the more easy since he had been training himself to regard the matter from a different standpoint ever since he first had the required money in his possession. Prior to that time, Tito had left in vague indecision the question whether, with the means in his power, he would not return and ascertain his father's fate. With the acquisition of the means he was forced to show his hand. The situation was simply this: selfishness overthrew natural gratitude, self-indulgence killed filial affection and sought to hide behind a weak uncertainty. That uncertainty was felt to be short lived and this astute slave to the evil of selfishness had in the interval thrown up another, though necessarily a weaker embankment behind which he might fortify his position when driven from the trenches that served his present purpose.

He trained himself to believe that after all a

man's first care should be for his own welfare. He had already brought into Baldassarre's life enough pleasure to compensate for all the benefits he had received at his hands. Baldassarre was old, even aged, he had had his quota of pleasure, his opportunity for usefulness. Was the remnant of his life worth to the world or to himself the tremendous sacrifice which it would demand of the young man just launching out into the sea of life's larger possibilities? Would it not be foolish to spend a bright new florin for the mere chance of recovering a worn-out lira? Could any one be so foolish as to regard such a policy a matter of duty which would be so clearly an act of folly? Should such an act not rather be regarded an over generous proof of friendship, to be judged on the basis of prudence rather than that of obligation?

This mode of thought led to the belief in a treacherous form of hedonism. "What, looked at closely, was the end of all life, but to extract the utmost sum of pleasure? And was not his own blooming life a promise of incomparably more pleasure, not for himself only, but for others, than the withered wintry life of a man

who has passed the time of keen enjoyment, and whose ideas had stiffened into barren rigidity?" He endeavors to convince himself that in that larger and more radically natural view by which the world belongs to youth and strength, the jewels, and therefore the florins, which actually belonged to Baldassarre were rather his who could extract the most pleasure out of them. Thus Tito forces himself to take refuge in a defence in which he does not honestly believe, but which he endeavors to persuade himself is sufficient to quiet his conscience, although he knows it is not enough to exonerate him, should his situation become known to the world. His moral life is, indeed, reduced to a sad state when his greatest hope is for the news of his benefactor's death, and his second, and, for the moment, most urgent desire is for the immediate death of his informant, Fra Luca.

It was because he believed that Fra Luca could not live to disclose his secret that Tito walked along with a light step, for the immediate fear had vanished and it was the fear of discovery rather than the sense of shame in his

own heart which gave him the greater concern. In speaking of him at this point the novelist says: "He was not out of love with goodness nor prepared to plunge into vice; he was in his fresh youth, with soft pulses for all charm and loveliness; he had still a healthy appetite for ordinary human joys, and the poison could only work by degrees. He had sold himself to evil, but at present life seemed so nearly the same to him that he was not conscious of the bond. He meant all things to go on as they had done before, both within and without him: he meant to win golden opinions by meritorious exertion, by ingenious learning, by amiable compliance. He was not going to do anything that would throw him out of harmony with the beings he cared for. And he cared supremely for Romola; he wished to have her for his majestic, beautiful and loving wife."*

The third great chapter in the story of Tito's fall begins with his denial of Baldassarre when they meet face to face so unexpectedly in Florence; but ere this occurs, the writer permits us

*Romola, Chap XII, p. 118.

occasional glimpses into the darkness of Tito's soul where we behold the writhing death-throes of his higher nature so completely strangled by his baser self, we witness likewise the beginning of a new phase of his moral degradation.

The first glimpse is taken directly after Tito and Romola have made known to each other their mutual love and have been blessed by Bardo, who encourages their union. "Romola's heart was perfectly satisfied. Not so Tito's. If the subtle mixture of good and evil prepares suffering for human truth and purity, there is also suffering prepared for the wrong doer by the same mingled conditions. As Tito kissed Romola on their parting that evening, the very strength of the thrill that moved his whole being at the sense that this woman, whose beauty it was hardly possible to think of as anything but the necessary consequence of her noble nature, loved him with all the tenderness that spoke in her clear eyes, brought a strong reaction of regret that he had not kept himself free from that first deceit which had dragged him into this danger of being disgraced before her.

There was a spring of bitterness mingled with that fountain of sweets."*

What a deep thrust Romola unwittingly deals him when unexpectedly meeting Tito as she hastens in secret to the bedside of her dying brother, she declares,—“It cost me a struggle to act in opposition to my father’s feelings, which I have always held to be just. I am almost sure you will think I have chosen rightly, Tito, because I have noticed that your nature is less rigid than mine, and nothing makes you angry: it would cost you less to be forgiving; though if you had seen your father forsaken by one to whom he had given his chief love—by one in whom he had planted his labor and his hopes—forsaken when his need was becoming greatest—even you, Tito, would find it hard to forgive.”†

Tito’s abandonment to despair when he foresees that Romola undoubtedly will learn from her dying brother all his secret, is no new step in his moral decline. It is simply the logical outcome of his previous actions. In the great

*Romola, p. 130.

†Romola, p. 136.

chess game being played by his nobler and his baser self the black, notwithstanding the fact that the white had the first move, is already far in the lead, two foolish moves in the early part of the game had combined to place the white queen, his strongest piece, in danger of a subtle and almost defenceless attack.

"Tito was at one of those lawless moments which come to us all if we have no guide but desire, and the pathway where desire leads us seems suddenly closed; he was ready to follow any beckoning that offered him an immediate purpose."*

It is just at this point that Tito begins a new phase of evil. Believing that Romola will no longer entertain any feeling but scorn for him, he finds relief in the trusting simplicity of the pretty Tessa. Till now his relations with her have been irreproachable, even commendable. It has delighted him to bring a little pleasure into her simple life. The enjoyment which he has experienced in her presence is rather that of the author than the

*Romola, p. 138.

recipient of pleasure. She is pretty, but what is more charming she is so openly dependent for her happiness upon the sunshine of his smiles that she is simply irresistible. She sounds in his nature a more impulsive, more sympathetic chord than the gracious, more platonic love of Romola can strike. With Romola gone, with the prospects for a brilliant future withered, he will, at least, forget the morrow in the pleasure of the moment. In this intoxication of despair he permits himself to go farther than he intended, so far, in fact, that he has not the moral courage to retrace his steps while it is yet time.

An explanation of the joke would cause Tessa pain and very likely be the means of awakening in her a distrust for him. It would be easier not to attempt an explanation nor was such really necessary since he could intimidate her into silence. Moreover the time might come when he would be willing to make Tessa his real wife, or she, the innocent child, might serve him unwittingly as his mistress if she were none the wiser. At least he would not rashly run into an explanation which would lose him Tessa, as he might lose Romola.

"Poor little Tessa had disappeared among the crowd of contadini; but the love which formed one web with all his worldly hopes—with the ambitions and pleasures which must make the solid part of his days—the love that was identified with his larger self—was not to be banished from his consciousness. Even to the man who presents the most elastic resistance to whatever is unpleasant there will come moments when the pressure from without is too strong for him, and he must feel the smart and the bruise in spite of himself. Such a moment had come to Tito. There was no possible attitude of mind, no scheme of action, by which the uprooting of all his newly planted hopes could be made otherwise than painful."*

When Tito learned that the dying monk's breath had been preserved as by a miracle, that he might make a disclosure to his sister, he felt that his fate was decided. His mind rushed over all the circumstances of his intended departure from Florence. Did he mean to go and rescue his father or simply escape from scornful looks and cutting words? Suppose that he

*Romola, p. 153.

intended to search for his father, would that make any amends for his former conduct? Was it already too late for such an act to find its least source in the merest spark of a noble impulse or would it simply be making virtue of a necessity?

Certainly the impulse, if there were any, proved too weak for independent action; for the necessity for departure withdrawn, all trace of the impulse vanished.

The denunciation of Baldassarre was not only a crime but a mistake. Absolutely as unnecessary as it was unpremeditated. "Some madman, surely." "He hardly knew how the words had come to his lips: there are moments," writes George Eliot, "when our passions speak and decide for us, and we seem to stand by and wonder. They carry in them an inspiration of crime, that in one instant does the work of long premeditation."*

If Tito had acknowledged his father, forgiveness would have been easy, the temporary embarrassment would quickly be explained away and he could have restored the old scholar

*Romola, p. 219.

to a place befitting his birth and scholastic attainments. But Tito was subject to that inexorable law of humanity, "We prepare ourselves for sudden deeds by the reiterated choice of good or evil that gradually determines character."*

He has taken the fatal step and he can not go back, he is forced to plunge into a more terrible crime. His safety depends upon proving his words true. Tito grasped at a thought more actively cruel than any he had ever previously entertained—might not he affirm that Baldassarre was mad and thus make void all of his statements concerning himself?

Any other man but Tito might have turned back, sought Baldassarre again, confessed everything to him—to Romola—to the world. But he could not. "He had no sense that there was strength and safety in truth, the only strength he trusted to lay in his ingenuity and his dissimulation."† Cool deceit and defensive armor should be his fortification.

"It was a characteristic fact in Tito's experi-

*Romola, p. 222.

†Romola, p. 223.

ence at this crisis," states the novelist, "that no direct measures for ridding himself of Baldassarre ever occurred to him."*

His policy in life had been to move along what he considered to be the channels of least resistance, and he wished to give no unnecessary pain to anyone.

If he had only had the presence of mind to recognize Baldassarre under that surprise! It would have been happier for him on all accounts; for it pained him to think that he was deliberately inflicting suffering on his father. He would very much have preferred that Baldassarre should be prosperous and happy. But there was no alternative. The instinct of the moral coward had asserted itself and become master of the situation in an unguarded moment. His future is simply the working out of this spirit of evil.

Tito has reached the limit, he can sink no lower, his subsequent acts which we condemn form no new phase in his downward progress, they are simply the steps necessary to the consistent pursuit of the evil policy upon which he

*Romola, p. 223.

has determined. The coat of fear, the sale of Bardo's library, the hideous lie he creates in answer to Baldassarre's declaration, his unfaithfulness to Romola and his illicit relations with Tessa are simply the natural manifestations of his lower nature which by frequent tampering with evil he has enthroned supreme.

One of the saddest of these acts is the sale of the library which is done as a means of providing himself ready money to aid him, should he be forced to suddenly quit Florence. This causes the first serious breach between him and Romola. Romola, who had lost first her brother, later her father, was now forced to lose faith in her husband.

Her life with Tito had not been altogether happy. At first she ascribed it to the irksome demands of her father. The dream of a triple life with an undivided sum of happiness had not been quite fulfilled, so that Romola with the first outburst of sorrow at her father's death was conscious of the thought that her life with Tito would henceforth be more perfect. But again she was disappointed. It was clear that their natures differed widely. She tried to per-

suade herself that the fault was hers. "Tito was really kinder than she was, better tempered, less proud and resentful; he had no angry retorts, he met all complaints with perfect sweetness; he only escaped as quietly as he could from things that were unpleasant." "It belongs to every large nature, when it is not under the immediate power of some strong unquestioning emotion, to suspect itself, and doubt the truth of its own impressions."* All endurance seemed easy to Romola rather than a state of mind in which she would admit to herself that Tito acted unworthily.

Her discovery of Tito's fear, the real meaning of which he did not share with her, her further discovery of Piero's distrust of him had no doubt shocked her keener sensibility into a vague suspicion of the truth that she did not enjoy Tito's complete confidence, that there was a side of his nature which she had not yet discovered. The shock came with its full force when she learned that her husband was wretch enough to sell away the very library and an-

*Romola, p. 242.

tiquities which remained to her the sole monument of her father's life work.

It was this act that opened the floodgates and poured into Romola's soul the depth of sorrow which makes of her the supreme character of the book, because she does not succumb to grief but learns from it the mission of endurance and gathers from it a new and powerful vitality of spirit, which makes of the too trusting wife a well-rounded woman, a heroine of independent action who not only endures her own sorrow but seeks to alleviate the distress of others.

CHAPTER V.

ROMOLA.

THE steps in the evolution of Romola's character are as clearly defined as those in Tito's decline, they are fewer in number and consequently more decisive, they require less explanation because they are also more simple.

As we first know her, Romola is a cultured, classically educated young woman whose entire being may be described as filial devotion. She is so wrapped up in the service of her blind old father that she knows little or nothing of real life save that which she gathers from the pages of literature and philosophy over which she spent her tender years. She knows nothing of love save that which she bears her father and her immediate relatives, and the first change in her awakening spirit is the discovery of the new vistas of joy which a realization of her love for Tito discloses to her imprisoned soul.

Thus joy is the first means of her develop-

ment ; and sorrow is the second. We have noted the gradual growth of her sorrow, which, like a smouldering flame, suddenly burst forth into an unmistakable conflagration of all the hopes of her bright young life.

The haughty Romola, instead of being quelled into stupor by this sad revelation, though wounded to the heart, becomes suddenly terrible in her anger. Quick as thought she deals a terrific thrust at the thief who has stolen away, not only her father's treasure, but her love and her joy.

"If my father had suspected you of being a faithless man," said Romola in a tone of bitter scorn, "he would have placed the library safely out of your power. But death overtook him too soon, and when you were sure his ear was deaf, and his hand stiff, you robbed him." She paused an instant and then added with gathering passion, "Have you robbed anybody else, who is *not* dead? Is that the reason you wear armor?"*

When she realizes the extent of her sorrow, Romola naturally determines to leave Tito, and

*Romola, p. 286.

does actually set out from Florence. It is on this journey that she experiences the third stage in the rectification of her womanly nature. Romola at this point may be defined as Purity under trial. She abhors that which is evil and flies from it, lest she be contaminated by its very presence. But she is blind to her loftiest obligations and is recalled to a true sense of her position by the warning voice of Savonarola, who is at this point the expression of the rectified intellect. Responsibility was incurred by Romola when she married Tito in spite of her brother's warning. She must now pay for her failure to heed that admonition. She is Tito's wife and may not desert him even in his infamy. If he were a malefactor her place would be in the prison beside him. The ideals of Christianity prevail over those of pagan purity, the idea of sacrifice overcomes that of escape from sorrow. The regeneration of Romola is effected by means of this servant of God who knew the depth of her sorrow. Savonarola proves to be the stronger personality and Romola is obedient to the voice of the prophet. She returns to a life of ministry and sadness.

It is in the capacity of a sister of mercy that Romola becomes acquainted with the misery of other lives which gives birth to her sympathetic nature that had hitherto been dwarfed by her too narrow outlook upon life.

Now it is, she learns the truth of Baldassarre's misery. Now it is she discovers Tito's other wife. The sin and shame of the world, the suffering of humanity, which were totally unknown to her girlhood, have left their trace of sadness on her beautiful face. Yet with the growth of her sympathies she forgets herself and her sorrows while her lofty spirit gradually measures up to the responsibility of service, to the grandeur of humility.

Romola even tries to become reconciled with Tito. "Tito," she said in a tone of agonized entreaty, "if you would once tell me everything, let it be what it may—I would not mind pain—that there might be no wall between us! Is it not possible that we could begin a new life?"* "O God, I have tried—I cannot help it," exclaimed Romola when her effort at reconciliation had only drawn from Tito a lie and a re-

*Romola, p. 410.

buke, "We shall always be divided unless misery should come and join us."*

So far Romola has not proved to be the strongest character in the book. There is one to whose will she has been subject because he was the expression of the higher life. Savonarola had always proved to be the stronger personality, Romola had always been forced to accept his admonition, to abide by his commands.

It would not be in keeping with the writer's art to permit him to hold the ascendancy over her throughout the entire piece. Romola as the supreme character of the book must show herself able to become independent of him when he fails to measure up to her ideals.

Savonarola's connection with the political forces in Florence gives Romola a chance to assert her independence of him, her superiority over him. That which in this case brought her into antagonism with him was the fact that he turned a deaf ear to her entreaty to save her venerable godfather's life.

"You brought me life and strength," she pleaded, "but I submitted because I felt the

*Romola, p. 412.

proffered strength—because I saw the light. Now I cannot see it. Father, you yourself declare that there comes a moment when the soul must have no guide but the voice within it to tell whether the consecrated thing has sacred virtue. And therefore I must speak."

"Do you then know so well what will further the coming of God's kingdom, father, that you will dare to despise the plea of mercy—of justice—of faithfulness to your own teaching? Has the French King then brought renovation to Italy? Take care, father, lest your enemies have some reason when they say that, in your visions of what will further God's kingdom, you see only what will strengthen your own party."

"And that is true!" said Savonarola, with flashing eyes, "The cause of my party is the cause of God's kingdom."

"I do not believe it!" said Romola, her whole frame shaken with passionate repugnance. "God's kingdom is something wider—else let me stand outside it with the beings that I love." Romola hastily covered her head and went out in silence.*

Thus Romola fortified by her generous devo-

*Romola, p. 488.

tion to her godfather proves herself greater than the dogmatic priest. She assumes the highest place by reason of a truer sympathy and a broader view. Still forced to endure at the hands of a more bigoted, more powerful physical nature, her spirit refuses to be longer subservient to the Dominican's hitherto overmastering power.

From this point on Savonarola declines while Romola becomes the one character of the book.

The drifting away of Romola is an almost poetic expression of the depth of her despair after the cruel execution of her godfather. The lack of the benediction of the Great Comforter is felt. The highest life cannot be attained by the self alone.

That which recalls Romola from the abandonment caused by her own sorrows is the cry of distress. She awakes again to the larger mission of living for others, of courageous endurance, and here she reaches the very highest plane of her spiritual development. A sympathetic soul which has known unlimited sorrow is noble enough to finally undertake the protection and guidance of the sorrow-stricken Tessa

and her fatherless children, the woman who had innocently robbed Romola of her husband's purity. Can there be longer doubt why the book is entitled "Romola"?

CHAPTER VI.

A FEW OBSERVATIONS.

HERE are a few questions suggested by the book which may lead to interesting discussion.

Does George Eliot refute the idea that scholarship is conducive to character?

I should say that she does not necessarily do so. Tito's scholarship was narrow, refined in the humanities, but pagan through and through. It was not the scholarship of growth, it did not bring him into the presence of living beings or their Creator, but simply the works of pagan philosophers and poets, long dead.

Does not the real harm of this book lie in the terrible thirst for vengeance which Baldassarre exhibits? What a terrible lesson of retribution! What an unchristian lack of forgiveness! "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, I will repay." In appealing thus strongly to the spirit of revenge, George Eliot strikes the lowest chord of human nature.

One very marked touch of the writer's art is shown in this. Two sons, Dino and Tito, both desert their fathers and leave them when their need becomes greatest and yet each son serves the other's father in that hour of need, Tito by carrying on the literary pursuits for which the blind Bardo had long missed his son; Dino by delivering to Tito information of Baldassarre's condition.

Another artistic touch is the vision which the dying Dino discloses to Romola. The blank face of the unknown man corresponds to the unknown character of Tito at the beginning of the story. The tempter's face is not revealed until it is too late.

The book of *Romola* is to me a great piece of music, a Beethoven's symphony, a composition which I enjoy, which to some slight degree I understand, but whose beauty and power can not be thoroughly explained.

The different characters seem to me like the different parts of the orchestra, all working in harmony, yet each following its own particular scroll. Some of these parts I can single out and appreciate. Savonarola is like the deep

bass undertone which gives a steady majesty to the entire piece, Tito is some splendid tenor part which at first captivates the ear but gradually dies into insignificance, Baldassarre is some hoarse instrument which sounds the note of alarm and seems to bring a triumphant discord into the melody, while Romola is the glorious soprano which from a humble beginning gradually asserts itself until in the end it carries almost alone the soul and theme of the piece. To him that *endureth* to the end shall be a crown of life. "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"*

Thus George Eliot employs art to teach again the old, old story.

"Why take the artistic way to prove so much?
Because it is the glory and the good or art,
That Art remains the one way possible
Of speaking truth, * * *
So may you paint your picture, twice show truth,
Beyond mere imagery on the wall,—
So note by note bring music from your mind,
Deeper than ever the Andante dived,—
So write a book shall mean, beyond the facts,
Suffice the eye and save the soul beside."

*Matthew XVI, 26.

The Ring and the Book, XII, 837-840, 858-863.

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